

Journeys of the self towards others

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BY NORA NAVARRO - DECEMBER 14, 2021

The artistic imagination of Yapci Ramos (Tenerife, Canarias – 1977) forms a kaleidoscope of multi-angled mirrors with fragments of stories, bodies, songs and rituals that turn inward, but with a reflective sheet towards the eye that looks, since her poetic search of the self projects symmetrical dialogues with alterity in order to read and rediscover herself in it.

But the artist knows that the look that observes from the other side through her lens only sees, in the background, her own drawing, because the universe of Yapci Ramos poses a circular and inexhaustible journey from the self to the others, “a double permanent game”, in the words of the writer and critic Simon Njami, which is only completed by those who refract the light towards their pond and look at themselves in the tremors of the water.

Her international career as a visual artist, video artist and photographer, who fluffed her wings in the 1990s and has toured art halls, galleries, fairs and biennials around the world, revolves around the backbones of the identity, sexuality and territory, with a multiformal and immersive character halfway between video art, photography and sound art, where each medium or language chooses the discourse, and not the other way around, like the scream that precedes the knot or the blood before the wound.

Trained in photography at the Central Saint Martins College of Arts & Design in London and creative documentary at the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, the scale of the map of actions in her work is emotional and physical, but also territorial, where the paths of the artist’s introspection pierce the roots of her Canarian origin, her generational heritage and her links with the neighboring African continent, but they also go through the body as a territory of exploration, conflicts, taboos, oppressions, revelations, catharsis, perpetual movement and, above all, expressive and creative force, with women as protagonist in the conquest of freedom.

Thus, the coordinates of the audiovisual narrative of Yapci Ramos acquire a universal dimension, not only because her work is nourished by codes and experiences of numerous trips and long-term artistic residences in Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean, with her residence set between Barcelona, Tenerife and New York, but because her creative processes travel the paths of the intimate and even the hidden, to later take a distance and distill the essence of the human being under the imprint of her identity ties, the tribulations of her time and the normative imperatives of her sociocultural and geographical context.

In addition, one of the artistic practices that runs through the whole of Yapci Ramos’ work corresponds to the repetition of the ritual as a symbol of purification, with almost performative representations that pay homage to that ancestral legacy and that, at the same time, explore questions of contemporary reality through ceremonies that gravitate and reflect on what we are: memory, time, nudity, loneliness, discovery, fragility, shame, rebellion. In this line, one of the common features of this artistic polyhedron is to make visible gender issues that remain in the social shadows, such as prostitution, menstruation or motherhood, which refer to a female self that is positioned through video art against the repression, denial or commodification of the body.

It could be said, with all these wickers, that the total universe of Yapci Ramos constitutes a ritual of self-knowledge, unfolding and transition under Pessoa’s principles, that: “to live is to be another” and “be plural like the universe”. But the simplicity and subtlety of each of her artistic proposals, which reproduce formulas of reiteration as an allegory of cycles and rites, house a narrative depth that allows each piece to be stripped of its leaves in multiple layers: in as many as the shapes and colors that the background of the kaleidoscope as it spins within itself.

“Back and forth. (...) You gonna have to walk this walk continually. (...) Until you get to the side where you wanna be”, as stated by one of the protagonists of the video piece *Back & Forth* (2018), where the artist portrays her group of friends from Barcelona between 2006 and 2008, sharing their dreams, expectations and projects, and who, a decade later, return to stand before the camera to recapitulate and close an arc of generational balance, in the conceptual trail that governs the work of filmmaker Richard Linklater: “the truth can only be expressed along a trajectory in time”.

The project that perhaps holistically encompasses the creative universe of Yapci Ramos is the exhibition trilogy that makes up the independent exhibitions *Show Me, Know Us and Welcome Her* (2019), curated by the historian and researcher specializing in gender Yolanda Peralta, which proposes as three vertices of an artistic triangulation of identity conceived as a construction of multiple configurations. This ambitious project is part of three times, three spaces and three diverse prisms that, together, place the woman under the influence at the center through an exhibition journey that begins with the revelation and culminates in the welcome.

Thus, *Show Me* is made up of a miscellany of faces overshadowed by social stigma and that look directly at Yapci's objective eye, as if they were breaking down the walls that silence erects around bodies. But this exhibition constitutes, in turn, an audiovisual cartography of the artist's career, since it brings together many of her most outstanding multimedia and photographic works, made between 2005 and 2018, where she reveals the strength of the moment and the fleeting emotion which crystallizes into an image when viewed, in the words of Wim Wenders, “at eye level”. One of her most symbolic representations is the photographic series *Perras* (2012), where the artist portrays these animals abandoned in the streets as a transcript of the marginality and isolation of the sex workers that she denounces in the city of San Nicolás, in the Caribbean island of Aruba.

The second chapter of this exhibition story offers a new look inside, which, on this occasion, climbs her family tree to start a performative game through the veins of her genetic identity. The artist selects different portraits from her family album and adopts the same gestures, postures and clothing, in an exercise of mimesis where she traces the lines that model her physiognomy and which she exhibits in dual portraits as hypnotic holograms, where an image is blurred and redrawn in the other. This formal proposal of *Know Us*, which explores the echoes of the past that reverberate within her to bring them to the present, materializes another of the common characteristics of her proposals, which is the total

participation of the spectator in the work, since the different faces in the show are revealed depending on where we stand to look.

Finally, *Welcome Her* disembarks at the last station of this exhibition journey and constitutes, precisely, a meta-reflection on the idea of transit and continuous movement that is framed in the context of the African continent, where the artist has worked on numerous occasions and with the that maintains a close emotional bond. This exhibition, which conceives migratory flows from the perspective of welcome, also reveals the immersive nature of her creative processes to superimpose her story on the stories of others, like her face on other faces or her questions on others pages that are rewritten in the encounter.

From a bird's eye view, Yapci Ramos' extensive artistic map houses a network of paths back and forth between pieces, actions and impulses that dialogue through time like filaments interwoven in the same yarn. In 2014, the artist finds herself secluded in a room on the seventh floor of a hotel located in one of the most insecure neighborhoods of Tegucigalpa, in Honduras, surrounded by a riot of gunfire and fear until, suddenly, she notices the song of a bird. Then, as a nod to the language of the Canarian aborigines, the first inhabitants of the islands, who founded the ancestral tradition of the Gomeran whistle to communicate across the ravines, Yapci decides to emulate their chirping and begins to whistle, as if initiating an accomplice dialogue from window to window, to uncage the anguish. The recording of that imaginary flight on the wire of uncertainty would make up her future sound piece *Freedom* (2019).

A year after her inauguration, the coronavirus pandemic puts the world in quarantine and decrees the real confinement of the freedoms of movement. The artist, who is enjoying an artistic residency at The Watermill Center Artist Residency, in New York, then summons several anonymous people so that, like her, they stand before the camera, reconnect with this state of crisis and record their tears in private in full catharsis, as part of a collective ritual of collapse and purification in the face of impotence. The final result is a video installation in multiscreen format, projected on a spherical altar with a circular path, like cycles and rites, entitled *Lloro* (2021). But the obverse of this piece actually goes back to the year 2018, with the work *I Don't Mind II* (2018), a ceremony of enjoyment whose sound section is made up of recordings of the orgasms and moans of its protagonists, where the artist's objective eye once again sheds light on veiled realities such as, in this case, sexuality and desire, recontextualizing the most private self in the public exhibition space, which

challenges us from everyday life.

Likewise, Yapci Ramos conceived her most visceral and organic piece of art over the course of two years, in which, every month, she stripped naked and wrote her questions with the ink of her menstrual blood on the marble wall of her shower, like a blank sheet, which she then diluted in tap water like a choreography of creation and destruction in 24 words: How, Why, Time, Now, Truth, You, Home, Yes, Trust, Wake Up. The Red-Hot video installation, which she inaugurated at the Catinca Tabacaru Gallery in New York in 2018, refers to the ancestral purification rite of the Canarian aborigines in the sea to perpetuate their fertility, since it is part of an international artistic current that dynamites taboos associated with menstruation, turning it into an expressive resource, and that Yapci uses to sublimate and bleed her anguish.

The passage of time in the signs on her back, the flickering of the fluorescent light that languishes in the bathroom, the accumulated blood that drips and becomes transparent in the water; together with the force of questioning from the most vulnerable place, the female body as a political position and resignification of identity, and the ceremony of returning to the starting point to cross to the other side, parade in the artist's most resounding work of art, born from her entrails -"with the material that I extracted from within myself", she states-, and with intimate liberation as the horizon of what is possible.

For all this, when Yapci Ramos faces her self-portrait in visual and sound format commissioned by Flux, the voice that emerges from the depths of her soul shakes the air

with the echoes of the aboriginal songs that nestle in her throat, like a melody that tunes from the land of its roots and that (un)ravels its ups and downs, the questioning words that bleed and whistle, the trips to remote places as paths back to the center of herself.

Then, her mirror is fragmented into pieces and colors of the stories of others, like the kaleidoscope that rotates in the void of time, but is recomposed each time she crosses her reflection and looks again from a different place. And she continues singing, after the silence, like someone who returns from death with the only revelation of continuing to search for Yapci Ramos, outside and inside Yapci Ramos, the one who screams, laughs and moans, the one who looks, questions and deconstructs, the one that is reborn, sings and flies.